

73

already beginning to tell, and he could await the result with confidence.¹

At the meeting of the Estates **in** the autumn of 1377 the Commons were in a strong position, owing to the disasters and bankruptcy to which the Government had to confess. The members came up to Westminster prepared to revive the aggressive policy of the Good Parliament. It was at this time the unfortunate custom of the electors to send up new men almost every year. Nothing could have so broken the continuity of parliamentary effort as this change of personnel. The election of persons experienced in ways and means at Westminster was particularly necessary during this period, for each fresh House of Commons, after its election, sat for a few weeks and was then dissolved, so that no man could learn his trade in the brief course of one Parliament. It was all the more desirable that the same person should be returned year after year. Yet, as the facts show,² this was very far from being generally the case. The county members in the fourteenth century³ were knights or franklins who regarded parliamentary duties as a burden. If they consented to take their turn once and again at doing the business of the country at Westminster some spring or autumn, they insisted on going back to spend the rest of their lives in war abroad or local affairs at home. For this reason there did not exist a class of leaders of the Commons such as grew up in the days of the Stuarts, when the same Parliament sat for years together, and a member became a public man by profession. Peter de la Mare himself never served in more than three successive assemblies, and was returned only for half the Parliaments of the years 1376 to 1384. It is necessary to bear in mind this difference between the mediaeval and modern House of Commons. Yet in October 1377, so great was the eagerness of the country to renew the policy of the Good Parliament, that, out of seventy-four knights of the shire elected, as many as twenty-three were veterans of that body.³ Their old Speaker, Peter de la Mare, who, during the servile

¹ *Mon. Eve.*, 3; *Chron. Ang.*, 151, 168-9; *Wals.*, i. 340, 345; *Hist. of Navy*, ii. 262; *Rot. Parl.*, iii. 70; *Feed.*, iv. 11, 16-17; *Froissart*, ii. chap. Ux, ³ *£1-8*, * *&l. B.*; *Wals.*, i. 343.